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THE HALL OF FAITH

HEBREWS 11

Faith Defined

Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith
is to see what you believe.

- Saint Augustine

What precisely is faith is the first question that needs to be tackled, particularly as in the eyes of the writer, it is so essential to the Christian walk. We need to remember that Scripture was not written originally with chapter and verse, these were letters written to churches and individuals, mostly read aloud at home church gatherings. This discussion is placed strategically near the end of this long letter. The writer of Hebrews has taken his readers on a journey of laying the foundation as to *why* we can have faith amidst *suffering* and *persecution*. *Why* we can be confident that our suffering is not in vain, *why* our sins are forgiven, and *why* we do not have to resort to a system of works to secure salvation. The readers like us are living in the most privileged time in all of history; the much-

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anticipated OT promise of the Messiah's coming is fulfilled. We are reaping the benefits of what that entails. All the sacrificial rituals that were incumbent upon all pre-cross believers, are now gone. Sins are no longer merely covered they are washed away. We no longer need human intercessors, Christ intercedes for us 24/7. Christ can identify with us in our suffering being Himself acquainted with suffering. Subsequent to Calvary, was the dawning of a new and liberating era.

Even so, this wonderful liberating news did not preclude those living post-cross from vacillating in their faith walk. The desire for release from their suffering and rescue from persecution to stand before Christ in His heavenly glory became overwhelming. Waking up every day facing the same circumstances as the day before and often with additional complications, became discouraging, caused them to become weary, their eternal focus became dim, and faith in the prospect of Christ taking them home became increasingly distant.

How will the writer of Hebrews inspire his readers? How will he resurrect their faith in the promises of Christ and encourage them to stand strong, despite what they are experiencing in the natural? *Faith in action* not merely theory, is what inspires people to press on when called to endure the most horrendous circumstances. Prior to elaborating on

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what faith looks like on the *ground running*, the writer defines it. As he *defines faith*, and the readers *articulate* this definition, all that follows in the chapter will come up in their thinking. The opening statement is epitomised in the lives of those that follow. What one notices is that these are not

*initial professions of faith, but lives of faith. The end is the evidence of a true beginning. Believers are to start in faith, continue in faith, and die in faith. The author of Hebrews evaluates the believer's life from its faithful conclusion as well as its faith beginning.*¹

So, what is faith? The opening statement of this chapter is “... *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*” (NKJ). Faith is to have “*complete trust and reliance, to believe in, to have confidence.*”²

Faith is the, “*confident assurance or substance of things hoped for and the evidence or proof of things we cannot yet see. Faith is trust in the unseen, not the unknown.*”³

¹ Utley, R. J. D., 1999: 113.

² Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A., 1996: 375.

³ Willmington, H. L., 1997: 760.

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Faith apprehends, “as a real fact what is not revealed to the senses. It rests on that fact, acts upon it, and is upheld by it in the face of all that seems to contradict it. Faith is a real seeing.”⁴

Faith is not ‘blind’ as some might suggest. It is the substance, or ‘ground,’ on which one ‘builds’ a hope. It is best described as the ‘title-deed’ of things hoped for.⁵ Faith is also a way of viewing all experience;⁶ it is to trust in the future, and then move into the realm of hope.⁷

In a world where people dismiss faith as ‘wishful thinking’, or simply identify it with the beliefs and practices of a particular religion, it is good to have a comprehensive picture of the faith that actually resonates with God. Hebrews shows the link between faith, hope, obedience, and endurance, illustrating that it is more than intellectual assent to certain beliefs. God-honoring faith takes God at His word, and lives expectantly and obediently in the present, waiting for Him to fulfill His promises. Such faith is often associated with suffering, and persecution in various forms.⁸

⁴ Vincent, M. R., 2002: Heb 11:1.

⁵ Wuest, K. S., 1997: Heb.11:1.

⁶ Walvoord, J. F., et. al., 1983: Heb.1:1-3.

⁷ Hacking, P. H., 2006: 70.

⁸ Carson, D. A., et. al., 1994: Heb.11:1-40.

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We live by faith more often than we realize. Every time you get in the car, you drive in faith with the hope the person on the right and left, in front and behind you, are capable of following the road rules and not under some mind-altering substance, which might precipitate a road accident. Every time you cross the road, you do so in faith, hoping that the person in the car will stop, and not decide to run you over. Every day we interact with people from all walks of life with faith in the basic goodness of humanity, and hope that will lead to productive and positive encounters. There is nothing to suggest that these situations will progress as you have the faith for, yet, because there are laws and protocols of behaviors in place, you conduct your life in faith that complete strangers will observe these. Often these Laws are not seen in writing personally, but you believe they exist, and conduct yourself in a manner suggesting you have.

We are operating by faith constantly. Every time we send information over the internet or mail a letter, we have faith that it will reach its destination, and the list goes on. Suffice it is to say, that faith is not confined to merely the biblical world, yet, is the most challenged when raised in relation to God, His promises, creation, the birth, life, death, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, and the future as laid out in the Bible. Why is that? Because faith's archenemy is Satan. His agenda is to sow seeds of

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hopelessness, disappointment, frustration, impatience, doubt, and small thinking. Biblical faith will challenge us on so many levels as the following examples will highlight, and it starts with our thinking.

It most certainly is a fight to walk the biblical faith walk. The fight is with our *flesh*, and compounded by the *enemy's agenda* to frustrate us at every turn. The faith walk demands a continual shift in our thinking, one predominantly conditioned by a world alienated from God. The Apostle Paul so eloquently states in Romans 12:2 that we are not to “... *be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, in order to prove by you what is that good and pleasing and perfect will of God.*” *Renewing* or *renovating* and *transforming*, are building metaphors, which involve the removal of something inferior, and replacing it with something of superior quality. As in the natural, so it is in the spiritual. Renovations take time; they take effort, can be very messy, and once completed must be maintained in order to preserve its pristine condition.

We observe the same elements present in body transformation shows like ‘*The Biggest Loser.*’ They need to mentally rethink their *approach to life, thoughts about themselves*, and then through the assistance of a *trainer* embark on a régime that guides them towards a significant transformation. They derive encouragement from one another as they undertake this journey, and

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inspired by others who have gone before them. That journey does not end once they have achieved their desired goal weight. It then becomes an ongoing commitment, to ensure they do not slip back into old thinking and habits.

Our journey of faith is not unlike these examples. We have to fight against mental conditioning we have been exposed to for the major part of our life. It takes time to make adjustments in our thinking, it is a messy journey, a life-long journey, we have the Holy Spirit who enables us in our journey, and we need to encourage one another until we stand in glory. In their walk of faith, the men and women of old would have embarked on this exact process. It is their faith walk, not merely declaration, which has God declaring them as having "*obtained a good testimony*" (NKJ). One cannot underestimate the power of the declarative word, as the writer highlights this as the *modus operandi* used by God in creating this world and all that inhabits it. *Selah!*

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